

Hey Lady at the McDonald Playplace,

You look like you have your hands full. Are those all your kids? Your narrow hips tell me you might be the nanny and your youth tells me you might even be the big sister but the children call you mommy and your identity is confirmed.

Your parenting like a champ right now. My girls have vacated the table and entered the McThunderdome. They've left remnants of their meal but their likely not coming back to eat it.

I see you're enjoying a salad. I'm sipping a coffee. I ate two cheeseburgers and most of Kate's fries but I got rid of the evidence, immediately. Now, as I sip my coffee I pretend to read the paper while I watch to see if the little one you called "baby boy" bursts into tears when you fail to notice his sister is stepping on his hand. You're not distracted by your phone, like me, or your cheeseburgers, like me but rather you're opening multiple tiny yogurts and handing out spoons. "Baby Boy" manages his emotions with the promise of going to play with his siblings after he finishes his last apple slice. His sister oblivious to her hand-crushing boot is busy placing her lips dangerously close to the fingerprint-smear window.

I'm sitting pretty with both girls happily playing. Grace is with random children she immediately fell into line with. Kate is studying the distance from the mini trampoline to the slide debating a jump. I'm not worried. Her record is far longer.

The girls are behaving and I am happy. I don't often have moments like this; moments to observe how other mothers manage. I am fascinated.

Your baby is eating yogurt with a spoon. Ugh, that stings a little. Those fine motor skills are top notch. Is she fussy at all? She looks like a good eater.

Your children refuse to enter the play-place at the same time. This means your hope for time to browse the newspapers you brought are shot. I feel for you but maybe my pity is ill-placed?

You don't break a sweat. I'm confused. This is tough for you, right? You have many tiny people demanding tasks of you and your salad sits untouched. Doesn't that bother you in the least? It will likely be the only meal you sit down to, today. What do you have that I don't have? It can't be sleep! There are five of them!

I've so rarely been in this position; watching another parent struggle to manage while I sit quietly and observe with my children somewhat quietly entertained. I'm selfishly bothered by your competence at this point. Why are you so calm? Can I get an exasperated: "wait a minute!" or "settle down"? Give me something, here.

Your littlest one comes out from the play-place and announces she has to go pee. Then you sigh. Ah, there it is. Okay, now I can relate. You begin to pack the crowd up because this isn't the spot to leave children unattended. You'll all be heading to the bathroom together and I am beginning to see cracks in that patient exterior.

Now, I like you. I'm considering striking up a conversation when you come back from your trek to the bathroom. Maybe, I will encourage Kate to walk over to your table. Kate will surely begin hugging you and that is always a great ice-breaker.

I sit back, contented that we are all in this together, when I hear:

"Mama, Kate bit someone!"

And there, just like that, I'm out. Oh well, maybe next time. Oh, and I totally spotted the giant coffee crisp in your purse. I see how you cope, now.